

# Explorations in Christian Theology

Fall, 2007; Rel 296, Fridays, 12:50 – 3:10, Hall of Science, 200

Instructor: Dr. Kelly Denton-Borhaug, Comen 214, [kdenton@moravian.edu](mailto:kdenton@moravian.edu), phone: X7104

Office Hours: T/Th 2:10-4:00; W 2-3

**Course Description:** This upper division course is designed for religion majors, and/or those students with sufficient background/ experience in religious studies for more advanced and in depth work in the study of religions. Following a number of conversations with religion majors last year and hearing their voices about preferred areas of upper division study, our focus for this course is sustained theological exploration. We will learn about the discipline of “systematic Christian theology” first by sinking into two very different examples of it. Our aim will be broad and profound reading, thinking, questioning, and conversation. Our class will be held in “seminar style,” meaning that a great deal of time will be devoted to group conversation, deliberation and learning from one another. We will study one classic Christian theological exposition from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner; and a second very contemporary example dealing with a type of theological work called “process theology,” this second example an anthology written by a group of theologians. During the third unit of our study this semester students individually will take leadership of our seminar, choosing appropriate readings for the class, leading the Friday seminar, and eventually taking the same material much further in a research project/paper.

## Required Texts:

Karl Rahner, *The Foundations of Christian Faith*, Crossroads Publishing Co. (first published in German in 1976)

Jay McDaniel, Donna Bowman, *Handbook of Process Theology*, Chalice Press, 2006

Additional texts will be determined by individual students in consultation with the professor after the first ½ of the semester. Methods of distribution TBA.

## Course Requirements:

- 1) It goes without saying that the success of a seminar such as this one is determined by the intellectual engagement and energy of its participants. You’ll be reading approximately 100 pages or so a week of stimulating, provocative *and* challenging material – you’ll need to allot at least six hours per week for adequate preparation for each Friday’s seminar. Once students begin taking on leadership for individual seminars, you can expect the time needed for expert and complete preparation to increase. Read this material in small chunks, maybe 20 pages at a time. Write extensive notes and questions in your margins; come to each seminar with a good

idea of the thread of argument in your reading *and* with at least three or four substantive questions or themes you wish to raise and discuss. A truly prepared student will take the time to write up summary notes of the reading in advance of each class. In order to encourage you in your in depth reading, ☺ every week's seminar will begin with a quiz on the reading assigned for that day. I also will be giving you reading "assists" each week that give you a heads up in term of the significant themes, terms, questions, etc. you should especially be looking for and thinking about as you read each week. Your engaged participation and performance on quizzes will account for 20% of your grade in this course. **There are no excused absences allowed for this seminar.** If you are seriously ill or have a family emergency or need for religious observance, you will not be excused unless you clear it with me *in advance* of the class you need to miss, and unless I judge this to be a truly necessary absence.

- 2) At the conclusion of our study of Rahner, and again when we finish our reading in process theology, we will have in-class writing exams. I'll give out more information about these exams as the first one draws closer. Each of the two exams will account for 20% of your grade.
- 3) The last 1/3 or more of our semester each student will be responsible for leading a full Friday seminar. As soon as possible you should begin thinking about the direction of your seminar/research project; I will ask students to make time to meet with me before the first half of the semester is over so that we may consult about your project. You may direct this in at least four ways: 1) focus on a particular theologian and her/his body of work; 2) focus on a particular locus of theology and compare and contrast the work of more than one theologian who has written in this area; 3) focus on a particular question, issue and theological exposition which in some way responds to this question/issue; 4) focus on a particular type of theology (process theology is one example). You will
  - a) Be proactive in your thinking, consulting with me, and carefully choosing a direction for this project; you should have a very good idea of your direction by fall recess. I can help you think this through! Feel free to meet with me more than once as you deliberate in this process.
  - b) Following your initial research in your project, decide upon approximately 75-85 pages that you wish all of the seminar participants to read as the focus of your particular Friday seminar; and deliver a copy to me of your reading material for the class *at least* two weeks before your seminar date; and develop and deliver to me at the same time a "reading assist" with a list of themes, questions and terms that you want students to be aware of and thinking about as they read;
  - c) You will make appropriate plans to distribute (or put on reserve at the library) your assigned reading for your seminar for your classmates, as well as distribute your "reading assist" to classmates *at least one full week in advance of the day you lead your seminar*;
  - d) Carefully plan your leadership for your given seminar, including presenting this material, and presiding over class discussion and dialogue (again, I ask that you consult with me about your planning of this process);
  - e) Lead your Friday seminar;

- f) Develop the material from your seminar further into a cogent, beautifully researched and written research paper of at least 15 pages (double-spaced) to be turned in at the semester's end. Leading the seminar is only the beginning of your research, thinking, reading and writing process leading to this paper. Your final product will demonstrate your careful grappling with additional primary and secondary research materials, and will utilize appropriate format and citation; consult with me about your bibliography and along the way in your writing process. Your leadership of our seminar and your final research paper each are worth 20% of your final grade.

***Important Note: Your seminar and project will be greatly enhanced by your choice of material that in some way matters to you personally! Be sure to think about this as you begin your deliberation about your choice of direction, and feel free to speak with me as well.***

## Schedule of Classes

### ***Unit I: Roman Catholic Systematic Theology***

**Aug. 31** Introduction to course

Class exercise: What is systematic theology? Taking a trip to Reeve's

Intro to the thought and life of Karl Rahner

Guest presenter: Father Wayne Killian

**Sept. 7** Read: *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Introduction, Sections I, II and III (through "Man as a Being Threatened Radically by Guilt")

Quiz on Reading

First ½ of class: Prof to highlight certain themes, issues, questions, passages

Second ½ of class: your themes, questions, concerns

***Sign up in class for the week you wish to lead the seminar***

**Sept. 14** Read: *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Section IV, V, and VI (through "Jesus Christ")

Same format as last week

***Make an appt. to meet with the professor re: your project either this or next week***

**Sept. 21** Read: *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Section VII (Christianity as Church)

First ½ of class: discussion and wrap up of our study of Rahner

Second half of class: exam

### ***Unit II: Process Theology***

**Sept. 28** (professor at conference; class will go ahead and meet)

Read: *Handbook of Process Theology*, Intro and Section I: God and Revelation

Questions for the class seminar: 1) What is different about this example of theological exposition from Rahner? What is similar? What stands out for you?

2) Review each chapter and make sure that you understand and discuss the main ideas being presented. What do you make of these ideas?

(No quiz this week)

**Oct. 5** Read: *Handbook of Process Theology*, Section II: Spirituality and Daily Life

Quiz on Reading

First ½ of class: Prof to highlight themes, issues, questions, passages

Second ½ of class: your themes, questions, concerns

***Begin submitting your readings and reading assists to professor***

**Oct. 12** Read: *Handbook of Process Theology*, Section III: Culture and Social Change

First ½ of class: discussion and wrap up of process theology

Second ½ of class: exam

### ***Unit III: Exploring Student-Initiated Theological Thinkers and Themes***

***Note: Each week will begin with a quiz on the readings for that day; the structure of the seminar will be designed by student leaders.***

Oct. 19

Oct. 26

Nov. 2

Nov. 9

Nov. 16 (no class; professor at conference)

Nov. 23 (no class; Thanksgiving recess)

Nov. 30

Dec. 7 We'll reserve ½ hour at the end of class today for wrap up, final musings and course evaluation. Your final papers will be due Monday Dec. 10 before midnight. Deliver your hardcopy to my office door box, Comen. 214.